# Contributed

## THE YOUTH OF CALVIN.

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II.

On the tenth of July, 1909, it will be four centuries since John Calvin, "the father an founder of the Reformed Churches," was born at Noyon, in Picardy. The Picardese were ever a peculiar people. Doumergue tells us that "they have a passionate desire to see the cause, in which they believe, triumph." The parents of Calvin were Gerard Chauvin or Cauvin and Jeanne LeFranc, "one of the most beautiful and pious women of her day." His grandfather was a cooper at Pont l'Eveque in Normandy, of whose house, in the closing years of the sixteenth century, some remnants remained, and which were visited, for the sake of their associations, by Alexander the Medici in 1598.

His father was a man of parts, sought out for his counsel both by the clergy and the nobility of his region. He was notary apostolic of the diocese of Noyon and secretary to its bishop, Charles de Hangest. Contrary to tradition, Doumergue claims that parts of the house, where Calvin was born, still exist, nay that such is the case with the very room where he first saw the light of day. Calvin enjoyed exceptional privileges of education, first in the house of the nobleman Mommor and later on in the best schools of France. Though he never joined the priesthood, he was supported, as a student, by the benefices of the chapel La Gesine and, later on, of Marteville and Pont l'Eveque. He never knew a childhood in the proper sense. Precociously developed, timid and retiring in disposition and very tender in conscience, his open disapproval of all evil, earned him among his schoolmates the nickname "Accusativus." His keen study of the law providentially fitted him for his later career and he earned the doctor's title, though he never used it. At Bourges, Wolmar opened the New Testament for him and thus made a break with Rome inevitable. This new study turned him back to theology, the new theology of the open Bible. How different this book, in its burning vitality, from the embellished copy, written on vellum, which he had seen, in iron chains, on the desk of the old home cathedral! Thus in 1531 he resolutely turned his face toward the Reformation. He returned to Paris and at once sought contact with the few pioneers of the movement in the capital. Preaching in the secret Huguenot conventicles he ended every sermon with the words—"If God be for us, who can be against us?" In the midst of these services, as later on he told Sadolet, in 1533, he was suddenly, fully, completely converted. It pleased God to reveal his Son in him. Says he, "God worked my conversion suddenly, suddenly he subjected my heart to the obedience of his will." His energy now was redoubled, he labored for all and shunned no danger. The well known Cop-inciden ully revealed his heretical views to the University and necessitated his immediate flight. He escaped as by the skin of his teeth and became an exile and wanderer, on All Saints Day, 1533.

The next year was one of restless wandering. From Angouleme he made brief excursions to Noyon, where in 1534 he resigned his benefices and sold his small patrimony; but especially to Nerac, to the court of Margaret of Valois, queen of Navarre, one of the noble protectresses of the Huguenot cause. There he met Lefevre, who by his work on the New Testament had laid the foundations of the Reformation in France; the setting sun mingling its beams with those of the dawn. But Paris drew him like a magnet and in the fall of 1534 we find him there again, in the direst peril. Never was a visit timed worse than this. The bigotry of some Protestants had aroused the fury of King Francis I and France was drenched in blood. And here he for the first time crossed the path of Servetus. Calvin challenged him to an open debate. Servetus failed to appear and thus unquestionably saved two lives.

Early in 1535 he was at Strasburg, where Bucer taught, with whom he had long since corresponded and with whom he was later on to be so intimately associated. Tarrying but a little while, he passed on to Basel, that Mecca of the intelligent minds of the day, the home of Erasmus, the "King of Humanists." He met the old lion, who was to die the next year, and Erasmus penetrated the secrets of the future and told his intimates what havoc this young man was to work with Rome. Here at Basel Calvin wrote the outlines of his greatest work, "The Institutes," which he developed, but never changed, in the later editions. This work finished, the "Wanderlust" again laid hold on Calvin and drove him southward to Italy. There the followers of the Spiritual Renaissance had prepared the way of the Reformation and were waiting for the dawn. To Italy therefore he went, for the sake of safety under an assumed name—Charles d'Espeville,

Thus the circle of his influence was extended, but also the jealousy and hatred of the Catholics was aroused and Calvin was once more compelled literally to flee for his life. The fountain in the market place of Aosta, erected in 1541 and restored in 1741, witnesses how close was his escape. Along the paths of the chamois he crossed the Alps and the suffering there endured was ineffaceably stamped on his weak constitution.

Drawn by the love of home, he braved all and once more visited Noyon, whence, accompanied by his brother, Anthon and his sister, Mary, he started back either to Basel or Strasburg, as Providence might indicate.

But the war in Lorraine compelled him to travel by way of Geneva and thus, toward the close of August, 1536, he entered the gates of that city, a wayfarer and a wanderer. Had Calvin known what would be the issue of this stay, would he have entered the city? Who knows? He was then a young man, but a little over twenty-seven years old, a youth in years, a mature man in intellect, shrinking and diffident by nature, a born recluse, yet destined by Providence to live under the full glare of the limelight of publicity and to stand in the front ranks of the battling hosts of the Reformation.

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